

Such Stuff podcast
Episode 6: Something Wicked This Way Comes

[Music plays]

Imogen Greenberg: Hello, I'm Imogen Greenberg and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

Well, the nights are closing in, the clocks have gone back... and something wicked this way comes...

It's Halloween at the Globe! So this week on the podcast, we search the Globe high and low for all things superstitious and spooky...

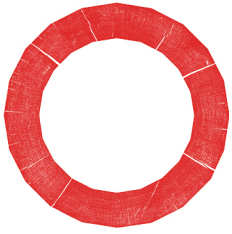
We went behind the scenes with the Macbeth company as things get witchy... We also went Globe ghost hunting with our very own Access Manager, David Bellwood, and discovered some outlandish stories old and new... And ever wondered how to make a realistic severed head? Well, we found out with prosthetics artist Suzi Battersby...

Stick with us for hauntings, ghosts, spirits, spectral dogs, severed heads and all things supernatural... Happy Halloween!

[Music plays]

IG: First up, we caught up with Macbeth director Rob Hastie. They're doing something a little different with the witches in this production... so we snuck into rehearsals to find out what they've been up to. We chatted superstitions, strange happenings and why we don't say the title of the Scottish play...

[Sounds of Macbeth rehearsals]

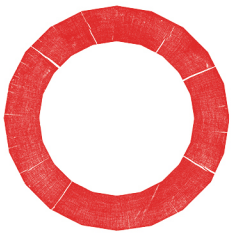


Joseph Marcell: Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff!
Beware the thane of Fife!

Rob Hastie: What we've got really interested in is the mechanics of a spell, being that a group of people turn up at a particular time and place and say a collection of words in a particular order, and if you say the words in that order, with the right intention, then something happens. And that seems to me to be, that's actually quite a good description of what a play is, that a group of people turn up, you know at a specified time and place and say some words in the right order and hopefully, if we've done our jobs, something happens.

So we got, we all got talking about what scares us and what lines we wouldn't cross. You know I'm a fully paid up rational secularist, I'm 99% card stamped for atheism so... And yet, there are still things I wouldn't... you know I don't really mess with tarot, I wouldn't do a ouija board, I'm a bit scared of walking in a graveyard after dark, and not just because of earthly fears but, but I'm a bit superstitious, it turns out. I thought I wasn't but there are things that actually, when challenged, actually I probably wouldn't mess with that. And so we were all talking about the thing you don't want to do in case it invites something in, and the play is very much about you know two people who kind of look over, look over into the abyss and step forward anyway. They sort of know that it's going to bring them nothing but misery but they do it anyway.

So we started thinking about, you know, what if voicing these witches, playing these witches was something that you didn't really want to do. You didn't really want to be the person embodying the spirits that night, being the kind of 'instruments of darkness' which is what Banquo calls them and so we thought, what if there is some sort of ritual or game whereby who has to embody the 'instruments of darkness' is randomly selected and could we do that for each performance? Could we do that you



know on each occasion when we all turn up in the specified time and place and say this particular form of words, in the hope that something happens. So that's the, that's what we've been working with. And then of course we start having fun looking at the ways... what kind of form that lottery or that ritual might take. I'm really interested in working on what the building gives us for free, on what that space is asking of us, and in particular looking at the candles that are such an integral part of that... of the experience of coming to see something at the Wanamaker.

[Sounds of Macbeth rehearsals]

Anna-Maria Nabirye: Where hast thou been, sister?

Catrin Aaron: Killing swine.

Kirsty Rider: Sister, where thou?

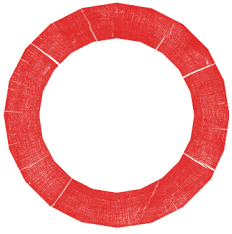
AN: A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,

And munched, and munched, and munched. "Give me,"

quoth I.

"Aroint thee, witch!" the rump-fed runnion cries.

RH: Yeah, some people were more up for it than others. Everyone was up for it, but some people did the maths and realised that meant learning a lot more dialogue than they'd signed up for. But everyone's got quite excited about the idea. When we've been trying it in the rehearsal room, there've been a couple of times we've looked at it in the rehearsal room when whichever method we've chosen to select the witches has thrown up the same person time and time again. Marc Elliott seems to be actually a witch [laughs]. It sort of got to the point where even the most sceptical of us were going 'Hang on there's



something happening here...' Or at least, we did think that until we realised that he'd just been swapping his lottery ticket for... with one of the other members of the cast who didn't know the lines yet, to help him out [laughs].

[Sounds of Macbeth rehearsals]

AN: But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

CA: I'll give thee a wind.

AN: Thou 'rt kind.

KR: And I another.

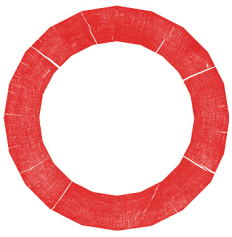
AN: I myself have all the other,
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tossed.
Look what I have.

CA: Show me, show me.

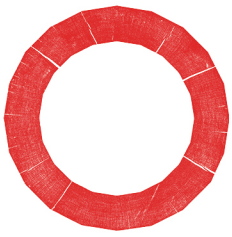
AN: Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wrecked as homeward he did come.

KR: A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

RH: We had a conversation on the first day about this superstition that persists about saying the name of this play, saying the name of this play not in context. There are sort of different variations on it and different authorities will claim where it comes from. I have no problem with saying Macbeth, but the temptation to knock on something as soon as I've said it has



grown over the course of the last few weeks. There were some actors in the company who didn't think that they would be anxious about saying that. But again, it's that feeling that I don't believe it, but better safe than sorry. You know a mind-set takes over whereby you go, well it doesn't cost me to just be safe and do the little ritual that will protect me from the whatever. It does seep into your, you just your everyday behaviour which is the slippery slope to superstition and eventually to the sort of mass delusions that lead to a kind of witch hunt. So today I'm going to step on cracks. Maybe one of the reasons why a superstition like the saying of the name of this play takes hold is because actors have to invest very deeply emotionally, spiritually, physically in something and in each other in a very short space of time, so actually picking up each other's ticks, each other's nuances, each other's beliefs even, is inevitable when you're in a context where you're asking people to be that open and make themselves that vulnerable. So you can see, you can absolutely see where it comes from and some of that stuff is useful, as well. It's useful to kind of charge the atmosphere. Michelle's talked about how it's a deceptive space because it feels very... it feels like it has a lot of history but it doesn't, it's only five years old, it's a new theatre, it doesn't have its own ghosts yet, so we're working hard to try and put some ghosts into the seams. We're discovering every time we get into the theatre and do some rehearsal in there that it has its own very specific demands that it makes of performers. In lots of ways it's the perfect space for this play, and the building itself is becoming a character in the story. One of the big questions of the play is who killed Duncan. Now I know in an immediate sense, it's Macbeth, but who's guiding Macbeth's hand? Is it his own volition, has he been persuaded to do it by his wife, has he been guided to it by the witches? Is it fate? Is it free will? And while those questions are in the air, there's something about that theatre that feels like it's a presence, that feels like it's... it sort of wants to put itself on the suspects list.



[Sounds of Macbeth rehearsals]

AN, CA, KR: The weird sisters, hand in
hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about,
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.

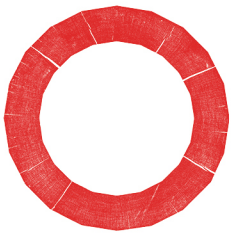
AN: Peace! The charm's wound up.

[Music plays]

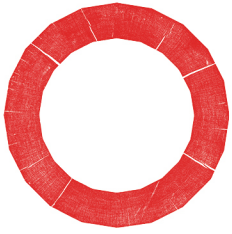
IG: Access Manager David Bellwood is generally known to be a huge fan of all things spooky ... So this Halloween, I set him a very special mission. It's time to go ghost hunting around the Globe... Here's David with a story of his own...

David Bellwood: So, I have a reputation. I have a reputation for liking spooky things. And I love spooky things, especially horror movies. Even my mug at work is an homage to The Halloween Tree by Raymond Bradbury. I'm really into spooky things. I love them. It doesn't mean I'm not a cynic. I don't go around presuming that everything I can't explain is supernatural. And generally around the Globe... it's a very modern building, it feels very modern, that's fine. And I have been here for ten years and never really witnessed anything. So this isn't a ghost story, it's not a supernatural story as such, it's probably just down to my overactive imagination.

When I first started working at the Globe, my job was to lock up. It was... I had to go round the building and every door had its own key and I had to lock every door in the whole site and switch off the lights in the room before I left it. So I was often in dark rooms or dark corridors, locking a door. And sometimes, you know, new to the job, locking myself in. And the first week went



fine because I had to be supervised, but the second week I was left to my own devices. In the attic, which is the heavens space above the Globe, I had to go up and I had to switch off all the lights and I had to lock all the doors. So I went up by myself and there was a particularly difficult to get to part of the attic which I crawled into to switch off the lights. And for the first time, and it was only week two, but for the first time I noticed there was an array of offerings to Bacchus, and Dionysus. And in true horror movie fashion, I chose that opportunity to speak to myself and I said 'Yeah right, I bet, you know, I bet Dionysus comes here often for a quick quaff', laughed at it, properly laughed at it, felt a distinct drop in temperature and thought 'I'm just going to leave this well enough alone'. Switched off the lights, locked the door. Thought nothing more of it, and that night, I had a nightmare. And I'm not really prone to nightmares and I think that's because of my addiction to horror movies, I'm just too full of scary stuff anyway. But I had a proper nightmare and it was about locking up the theatre, so I was in my nightmare, in the attic once again, and I had my back to the crawl spaces as I was locked this door and I could just feel the presence of this giant, angry shadow behind me. And it was terrifying, it was properly terrifying, it was proper panic in my dream. And there was this voice, and it wasn't really a... obviously this is a dream still, it wasn't really a physical voice, it was more sort of a voice inside my head inside my head if you will, and it said 'No laughing'. And I freaking knew it was Dionysus. Woke up, cold sweats. Went back to sleep, fine. Woke up, thought, 'Haha [laughs], you scared yourself silly at work.' It was locking up dark rooms so you can understand that. Next night comes, half ten at night, have to lock up, I'm back in the attic. And I sort of nod in acknowledgement to the offerings to Dionysus. That is... I am far more respectful of this now. Thank you subconscious, and as I close the doors to what's the lift, the backstage lift, someone has put up a sign which reads 'No laughing'. And it freaked me out. No... I hadn't told anyone about the dream, it was clearly just some, someone backstage trying to get the cast to make sure they behave themselves side stage.



And probably it was there the night before, but I just had no recollection of it. Probably it seeped into my subconscious, but I swear it hadn't. So that... it's not a ghost story, that is not a ghost story but that is the spookiest thing that has happened to me here... by a long shot.

[Music plays]

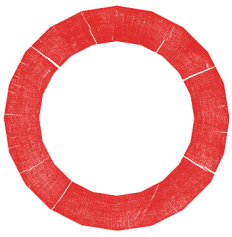
IG: David searched high and low, and turned up some pretty good stories... In the early days of our Globe theatre, a security guard on night shifts used to see a woman in white walking across the yard...

In the very first dress rehearsal of the very first show at the Globe, a photo was taken facing outwards from the stage... and the story goes that, despite it being a closed rehearsal, with no access to the theatre... somewhere in the middle gallery, there were two figures, dressed in Tudor clothes... the word had obviously gotten round that the Globe was open for business again...

One of our security team regularly patrols the Globe at night... and as he walks from the attic, above the stage, round to the North tower... he can always feel something walking behind him. The hairs on the back of his neck go up. It's always around midnight, and only ever in that part of the theatre...

What about the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse? As Rob says, it's actually a very new theatre, and he reckons it hasn't got any ghosts in its seams yet... well, David chatted to Rona from our Digital Team, who has her own Playhouse ghost story...

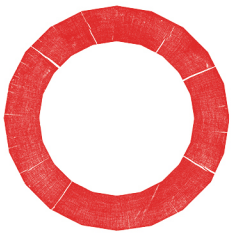
Rona Kelly: So [laughs]... I do a lot of filming here at the Globe and one of my earliest shoots was in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse so I just went down to set up the big camera on this massive tripod, set it up right against the door of the stage, so



we could get a lovely shot of someone coming out. Of course, I'm forgetful so I just forget my headphones upstairs and I dash upstairs to go and get them, maybe about a two minute trip. I come back downstairs, come through the stage doors and I go, 'Where's my camera gone?' And I look all around and I see it's actually been moved to the entrance to the pit, which is a good couple of feet away and I'm kind of like, 'Ah someone's moved by camera that's so annoying'. But as I get closer I can see it's almost been knocked over, it's almost been kind of pushed. It's lying on its side, it's completely switched off, I'd left it on. I was going, 'This is somewhat strange'. So I go outside and I have a chat with our lovely welcome desk team and I say 'Who moved my camera?' and they went 'No one's been in theatre'. I went, 'No, I know that someone's moved my camera' and they go 'No, no one's set foot in that theatre since you left two minutes ago'. Go round to security, check in with them at stage door and say 'Have any of you guys gone in, round one of the back entrances'. Absolutely no one was in the theatre between me leaving and coming back in, and somehow my camera moved from right onstage all the way down to the pit. And I've no idea how. Although I think I feel like I know how. Someone was not happy that I was there. I don't love going in by myself anymore and every time I go in since then, I do get a little chill. And I've definitely heard footsteps up in the upper gallery when you're filming and you do a quick shout and you go 'Hi, just to let you know this is a live set' or something. No one replies. No one's up there...

[Music plays].

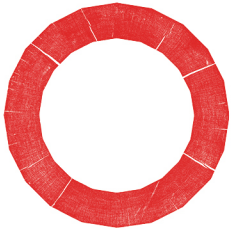
IG: We suspected that Southwark might have had a few stories to tell... so David joined Jon from our Exhibition Team, to share some of the stories that came to be told about the local area, once on the wild outskirts of London... Here's Jon with some of the very best and most outrageous local ghost stories and urban legends he could find...



Jon Kaneko-James: What happens in the story of the ghost of Mr Philips... he's a special English ghost-type called a revenant and basically revenants are completely physical. They don't do the like the O Henry, sort of Shirley Jackson scare you to death type ghost, a revenant will just beat you to death. Mr Philips was a terrible miser, he buried all his money before he died so that his wife wouldn't get it and even after he died, he came back, his body rose again to guard his wealth. The problem is he was not a very social spook 'cos he would, apparently he would get lost in his neighbours gardens and trash them and wonder about the area smelling bad and making noises and generally being a real sort of pain. And so eventually Mrs Philips who, his ghost always said was in the garden trying to find his money and dig it up, which was why he was there. But she just said, you know, 'Don't be ridiculous, I don't want your horrible money'. And anyway, she tried to get a priest to exorcise him. But of course, this is like the late 16th century, the Anglican church had banned priests from exorcising, and so she couldn't find one, so she did the next best thing. She found an actor who'd played either a priest or a wizard onstage and got him to do it. So you have this motley crew of actors who come down from one of the local theatres, who come at night to the garden where Mr Philips is wandering around and they do the exorcism pretty much from a play that they've been in, and you know, they do the scene, they feel their motivation and Mr Philips turns to them, and he says this poem. Something along the lines of, you know, 'Though you disturb my wealth, ye who try / I have known that even men may die'. And then Mr Philips explodes. Um. He just detonates!

[Music plays]

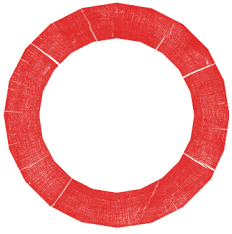
JK: There is another ghost, and its earlier than Shakespeare's era, which is the story of John Overs, who is a sort of semi-mythical figure. There was possibly a guy called John Overs who was involved in the founding of The Priory, which would eventually become St Saviour's Church, which is now Southwark



Cathedral and the story is that he was a waterman and that he was this awful, awful miser... again. And that he decided, well he didn't decide, he realised that of course if he died everybody would go into mourning and they would like be drinking water and not eating for a whole day and he decided that was an amazing way to save a day's money. And so he got a coffin, pretended to be dead. Obviously he you know lays himself out in the coffin and his family all come down. But to his absolute horror instead of going into mourning, they're excited. They're like 'oh my god, he's finally dead!' And they start opening his wine, and like getting his food out of the kitchen and sitting around the coffin talking about how horrible he is. And so after a little while of this, he sits up in the coffin, going 'Raaahhhh'. But you know, revenants are a thing, these physical ghosts are totally a thing. They assume he is now risen and so the poor guy gets battered to death with an oar.

[Music plays]

JK: Another good one, one of the big influential lawyers at Middle Temple Hall, was a chap named Robin Bridges. Now Bridges was a very sort of religious man. He was a borderline, what we would now call Puritan, what they at the time would have called the godly. And he'd just been to a lecture about predestination, and he started to believe he was terribly evil and that he was going to go to hell. And he tried to kill himself and it didn't work, he survived and then he started seeing things. And he went to Southwark, we wonder whether it was to you know, to have a little bit of the sin, of this area being a very big red light district, and he starts seeing this black dog follow him. And so he gets kind of pursued through the area by this black dog until eventually he hides in a local house until it goes away. 'Cos he even tries, if my memory serves me correctly, right getting in the water and it's just like happy to paddle out and so he then goes and he just hides and when he gets back to the north of the river, he becomes fully demonically possessed and for I think, four or

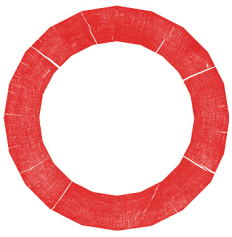


five days at sort of his rooms, he then lies paralysed and narrates his battles with the devil and it becomes a bit of a tourist attraction. And you've got people every morning, 'cos he's very regular, he goes on the clock at about 8 o'clock and usually comes off, I think it's late afternoon, it's about 4 o'clock when he usually finishes his possession. And because he's so regular, you know, people just turn up, you know, they turn up to watch Bridges' battle with the devil and watch him narrative these things happening and how the Queen of Hell is tempting him and all of this stuff and then four it's over. That is one of the great historical walls to be a fly on. Yeah so those are the ones I know the best about this area...

[Music plays]

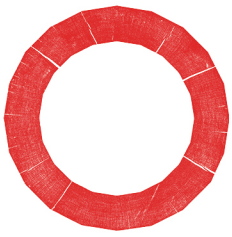
IG: Every half term, we put together Half Term Tales, a series of events for kids and families here at the Globe... this year, prosthetics artist Suzi Battersby joined us for a special workshop, in which kids made their very own severed fingers. I chatted to her after the event about the secrets behind the severed heads she makes for theatre shows...

Suzi Battersby: My name is Suzi Battersby, and I am a freelance prosthetics artist. Well it's mostly, well props, but not theatre props that you might normally think of. I specialise in doing prosthetic props, I guess, is the good way of describing it so I'll do realistic silicon props for like body parts and severed heads, the kind of things that you might encounter in a Shakespeare play [laughs]. Unfortunately, I mean prosthetics that you glue on people's faces, which is something that I do quite a lot of for film and TV, it's difficult often for that to happen in theatre, purely for budgetary reasons but also because of time. You can imagine people getting ready backstage, doing prosthetics would be quite an ordeal. So yeah no mostly I do like realistic body parts and gory stuff like that.



So they're never just any old heads right otherwise you would just use something that you had in stock right, it wouldn't matter but I get asked in when it needs to be matching an actor. So in the case of, I mean the first severed head I made for the Globe was for Cymbeline, which they did in 2015. And they really wanted to do something properly realistic, something to be really shocking for the audience so I had to basically make one that looked like Calum, who was the actor doing the part and you go from there basically. You have to, I have to meet with them and take their skin colour, I have to take their eye colour, their hair colour, and then I also need to then take an actual cast of their head which involves covering their faces in a life casting product, in that case it was alginate. Basically I smother somebody's head in that, being very careful to leave their nose free so they can breathe, it's very important. I think in every severed head I've done, I've had to re-sculpt the face a little bit to give them the expression that the director's really after but it's difficult because you want to tread a really fine line between what looks real and what looks funny 'cos in real life [laughs], we don't see severed heads on the street [laughs]. So a lot of what is medically accurate is actually quite comical so I often have to temper it with what they've asked for and kind of... you know, artistic licence, kind of suggest something that's gonna do the job without it being too shocking for the audience. One of them I did recently, I had to re-sculpt it so she looked really shocked and like scared, as she was getting beheaded. So she had a really quite sweet sort of frown and a screaming mouth.

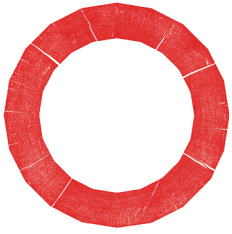
To be honest, I really quite love it, I don't know why, I get much more satisfaction artistically trying to create something that's real rather than something that's imaginary. There's something so satisfying about being given a brief that's true to life because it gives you something, like a science that you can actually look into and research. I never get sick of it and so for me, like a severed head, for example, it would be like, well, how did they die? Was it you know, was it a cut with a sword? Was it a cut



with an axe? Was it a blow to the head? Was it an accident? All kinds of things might lead to that happening, there's not one kind of severed head. And my dad's also a brain surgeon, so he's like a helpful person to have to hand and call up, and say 'How much bleeding would happen if...[laughs] this happened to this person?' And he's quite used to it now.

I reckon I'm 90% unflappable. There's a very... there's still stuff that I look at, when I'm looking up research, that turns my stomach. But it's not the stuff that's the most gory to be honest, it's the stuff that just looks unnatural. So, that I find the most gruesome. So something like a broken bone that hasn't burst the skin and you just see like an arm or a leg at an angle that just... that looks wrong. That's the stuff that really gets me. Because I think blood and stuff like... I'm so used to seeing it now and I'm so used to looking at it as an artist, right? And actually, and this isn't true for me, this is true for anybody you meet who does prosthetics, we're all the same, if somebody has fallen down and got a big bruise, we're all like 'show us the picture, show us the picture'. We want to see it for reference, because there's so many beautiful colours that come out of it you know, which is a weird thing to say but we do find beauty in skin diseases and... I did this thing recently that was osteomyelitis, which is a bone infection that causes the skin above it to kind of rot. I mean it sounds awful and it looks really, really painful, but you get this incredible array of colours in there. So I never find that stuff gory, I find it fascinating.

What's weird to other people is probably not weird to me 'cos I make severed heads all the time. [Laughs]. It might have to just be severed heads and decapitated bodies but um... Oh no, actually, tell a lie. I have got the weirdest thing. I used to work at English National Opera in their prop workshop and we made a enormous bottom of the statue of David for a Terry Gilliam opera so that's probably the weirdest [laughs] thinking about it.



IG: How long does it take you to make...?

SB: A giant bum? [Laughs]. It was a team effort so... I don't know. I think it was, what? A couple of weeks? It was enormous.

[Music plays]

IG: That's it from Halloween here at the Globe!

You can catch Macbeth in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse from 7 November to 2 February.

Suzi's workshop was part of Half Term Tales, which will be back next half term with more workshops, activities and storytelling.

You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg.

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